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DE RUEHPS #0308/01 0971719
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FM USOFFICE PRISTINA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6005
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000308

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USUN FOR SCHUFLETWOSKI, USOSCE FOR STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2016

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: STAKES HIGH AS LDK CHOOSES NEW LEADER

REF: (A) PRISTINA 131 (B) 05 PRISTINA 1224

Classified By: COM Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) SUMMARY. The next president of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (LDK) could reconfigure the government, the Assembly leadership, and a good part of the makeup of Kosovo's final status negotiating team. With the passing of Ibrahim Rugova, the LDK leadership has no organizational center and the party will drift into a convention this summer at which it will elect its new leadership. Several pretenders have already emerged, chief among them the embittered Nexhat Daci, recently ousted as president of the Kosovo Assembly. The race is wide open and the stakes, for Kosovo's democracy and the final status process, are huge. END SUMMARY.

Why We Care Who Runs The LDK

12. (SBU) The president of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) has the ex-officio potential to become a kingmaker. The late President Ibrahim Rugova wielded unchecked power within the party, effectively naming every LDK official from the president of the Assembly to submunicipal officials. Although a great deal of Rugova's power derived from his unique personal stature as the de facto father of Kosovo, his successor as LDK president will nevertheless carry a great deal of clout in his own right on at least an ex officio basis. The room to operate afforded the new party president, on the other hand, will depend in large measure on his ability to unify behind him (there is little chance of a woman being elected) the 20-member party presidency, also to be elected at the coming convention. (COMMENT. It is safe to say Rugova never had to give a thought to the views of the party presidency, and rarely did. END COMMENT.)

13. (SBU) Election of a new LDK president and presidency is of particular interest to the international community in that the LDK is easily the major partner (47 seats) in the governing coalition (65 seats total). The LDK's dominance of the Kosovo political scene translates to control or veto power over three seats (president of Kosovo, Assembly president, and prime minister) on the five-seat Kosovo Albanian final status negotiating team (aka the "Unity Team").

¶4. (SBU) Kosovo law requires political parties to hold internal elections at least every two years. The LDK's last party-wide get-together was in July, 2004 and resembled much more a coronation (of Rugova) than a convention. The gathering included a general assembly of 275 delegates, a meeting of the 151-member general council, and election of the party president (Rugova) and presidency -- all of which was concluded in two hours flat.

¶5. (C) The LDK's 2006 convention will be different. Control of the party is very much up in the air with one candidate for party president (Nexhat Daci) already announced and several others testing the waters. Daci, recently unceremoniously ousted as Assembly president in large measure because of his autocratic style and disruptive influence within the Unity Team (Ref A), is clearly bent on pay-back. The cornerstones of his support have become apparent as he very publicly cultivates both diaspora financier Bexhet Pacoli and LDK Youth Forum leader Sejde Tolaj. Daci also less publicly pursues an on again-off again courtship with shadowy Rugova family intimate Rame Maraj (Ref B) who, in turn, continues quiet associations of apparently mutual convenience with Culture Minister Astrit Haracija, Public Services Minister Melihate Termkolli, Deputy Prime Minister Lutfi Haziri, and Tolaj.

¶6. (C) Fluidly allied against the Daci camp are LDK "old guard" members including Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu, Assembly President Kole Berisha, and Kosovo Assembly

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presidency member Sabri Hamiti. On April 6 Berisha expressed to E/P chief his increasing concern that the Daci camp has taken advantage of the old guard's preoccupation with governing and the final status process to steal the campaign march. He suggested that several pending audits and investigations of Daci camp members could counter that advantage if brought to fruition before the convention. Another possibility is that the convention could be delayed if the general Kosovo elections set for October 2006 are themselves postponed by SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen until after the status decision.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. Major change in Unity Team composition or negotiating positions would be most unwelcome as the final status process reaches what otherwise would be its culmination. The LDK's long history of back room dealing has left the party ill-equipped to deal with the sudden onset of real internal democracy. Much as the LDK is getting a measure of what it deserves, therefore, summer 2006 is hardly the best time to settle accounts.

¶8. (SBU) Post clears this cable for release in its entirety to UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG